

GOD HAS FOUR WAYS

Devotional Message
by Willis E. Bishop

I'm reading for our devotions this morning a part of the familiar Christmas story from Luke 1:

Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. And the angel said, 'Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb, bring forth a Son and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Highest, and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father, David.'

Then Mary said to the angel, 'How can this be since I do not know a man?' And the angel answered and said to her, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Highest will overshadow you. Therefore, also that holy one who is to be born will be called the Son of God. For with God nothing will be impossible.' Then Mary said, 'Behold the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.' And the angel departed from her."

In the Scriptures we find that God has four ways to make intelligent creatures. The first way is by creation. I think of the angels in this respect. How do you make something that is spirit, yet can appear in a body, can travel faster than light, that knows the language of any person with whom he comes in contact?

Remarkable are the angels - they neither marry nor are given in marriage. Therefore, each one of them was a separate, individual creation of God. Their number neither increases nor decreases. The same could be said of the cherubim. From the early chapters of the Scriptures we find God placing the cherubim at the entrance to the Garden of Eden to keep Adam and Eve from returning to the Tree of Life. In Ezekiel chapter 1 we have a fantastic description of the cherubim, and on through to the book of Revelation where we find them appearing again in great numbers, similar to the angels but entirely different, having wings, having a number of faces -- remarkable creatures that God created directly. The same is true of the seraphim, occurring only one time in the Scriptures, in Isaiah chapter 6, apparently guardians of the holiness of God.

I suppose supremely in this connection we ought to mention the creation of Adam. I'm reading now from the early chapters of Genesis in connection with him:

And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul.

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Adam, a complete being, was a direct creation of God. Let me repeat, God does have four ways of making intelligent creatures, and one of them is by direct creation.

The second way I suggest to you is what I have called "semi-creation." I read again from Genesis:

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall on Adam, and he slept. And He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.

Taking part - actually the Hebrew word there is a "side part," which must have involved some flesh, which must have involved some blood. We do not have time this morning to stop on the theological implications of that fact. But around that side part of Adam God built [and the Hebrew word says "built"] woman and brought her unto him. I call it semi-creation. It has often been said that when Adam saw her he said, "You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

The Jews have a tradition that there was another woman around named "Lileth," but that is entirely without biblical foundation. We know Adam to be the first man and Eve, by semi-creation, to be the first woman.

The third way God has of making intelligent creatures is by what is called "procreation." You and I are products of that particular process. God put into the bodies of man and woman the ability to bring forth complete, perfect, intelligent creations. God is working this way since the time of Adam and Eve -- procreation. You and I are results of that.

Someone asks occasionally, "Where do the soul and spirit come from?" Theologians are divided on this particular point. Some believe in the preexistence of the soul and the spirit; that is, God knew how many human beings there would be in the world, and while He was creating, He created enough souls and spirits and put them on the shelf. Then when a child is conceived, He takes a soul and a spirit from the shelf and places them into that little body. That probably is not correct because Christ remembered His preexistence and you and I do not. I know there are some today who claim to have a knowledge of a former existence, but that's not biblical. If you are familiar with "NuAge" truth, you'll know that it's entirely false. Others believe that sometime between conception and birth God creates a soul and spirit and places them into that little body in the womb of the mother. Again, that probably is not correct because God has ceased from His work of creation.

The most likely viewpoint with regard to this is that God gives to the father and the mother the ability not only to make the body,

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but the soul and the spirit as well. So that from the moment of conception to the moment of birth, that entire process results in body, soul and spirit. In Psalm 139 the psalmist describes in a wonderful way the formation of the child in the womb of the mother.

The last view [in the preceding paragraph], called the "traducianist" view, is probably the correct view. In the Scriptures we're told that Levi paid tithes to Melchizedek in the loins of Abraham. Levi was not born until some six or eight hundred years after the time of Abraham, and yet it is said that he paid tithes in the loins of Abraham.

If you and I were to go out to some deserted place and I would carry with me one little, single acorn and we would have a ceremony in which we would plant that acorn in the ground, and then a thousand years from now you and I would go and visit that same place, instead of finding just an acorn in the ground, we would see an entire forest of oak trees. Someone would ask, "Where did that forest come from?"

Then we would remember that one little acorn that we'd planted in the ground. And so God, in the bodies of Adam and Eve, gave that power, that property, that ability to produce and pass on that power to others. So that while we were in Adam, as the Scripture says, God gave to us the power of procreation to bring into the world intelligent creatures.

The fourth way God made an intelligent human being, the one about which I read to you from the Word of God a few moments ago, is by incarnation -- the virgin birth. God gave power to a woman to bring forth a son without the aid of a human father -- a remarkable thing which God, who is able to do all things which are legitimate, was able to bring to pass nineteen hundred years ago in the virgin birth of our Lord.

Suppose we lived back in the time of Joseph and Mary and we were trying to find out where the Messiah was, and we had enough information to find out (and we know this from the Scriptures) that Joseph was the son of David, and had there been a kingdom at that time he quite likely would have been the king of Israel. So we visit Joseph and Mary's home to see if we can find the Messiah.

Today if you visit Nazareth you have trouble finding their home because they have built that very, very large church (I think the largest church in all the Middle East) over the traditional spot where Jesus lived with Joseph and Mary. You go down some stone steps into a little cave. Whether that's the spot or not it is probably one quite like it.

When we go to the home of Joseph and Mary, there we see that five boys and at least three girls are playing on the floor. We say to Joseph and Mary, "We're looking for the Messiah. We know you are

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the son of David, but which one of these boys is that One?" Immediately Mary responds, "I can tell you which one, for back in the time of Isaiah, Isaiah said, 'And the virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son'. This is the sign, and the one that is virgin born is the Messiah."

And so, we have God's ways of creating intelligent creatures -- creation, semi-creation, procreation, and incarnation. We thank God that the culmination of it all was in the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, even as the angel told Joseph, "Name Him Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins."

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for the remarkable way in which You have dealt with us as a human race, and as human beings. We realize we are lost and undone apart from that great, great work of Christmas -- the work of a Saviour who came through virgin birth and was kept sinless by the Holy Spirit, and as a sinless sacrifice on Calvary paid for our sins. We commit this day unto Thee. Go before us, remain under us, strengthen us, guide us, we do pray, in the center of your perfect will, for Jesus' sake. Amen.